

# **An American in Oslo**

## *The Motivations which Lead American University Students to Study Abroad in Norway*

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# Abstract

The main objective of this thesis is to discover the motivations that lead American students to study abroad in Norway, but it also hopes to shed light on the importance of cross-cultural understanding and awareness in today's world, particularly for Americans. Seven Americans currently studying at the University of Oslo were interviewed and it was determined that the decision to go abroad and to choose a destination country is a complex process that involves many motivations and influences and can be affected by many barriers. Key theories are used to conceptualize these elements which make up the decision-making process. The most important motivations for studying abroad present in all of the participants' responses are personal rather than professional. The most important motivations for choosing Norway mentioned by all participants are related to family heritage and discovering aspects of the Norwegian culture. These can be described as country-specific motivations. The benefits and implications of this type of study for both the United States and Norway are also discussed.

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# 1 Introduction

As far back as I can remember I have been interested in other cultures. As a child I would look at world maps and dream about visiting as many countries as possible. My dream came true at thirteen when I went on my first tour of Europe. After the experience I knew that it would not be my last trip abroad, and once I got older and went to university I was able to take my dream even further by undergoing my first study abroad experience in France. That six month experience adapting to a new way of life, language and outlook made a monumental impact on my way of thinking and helped transform me into the person I am today. This intrigued me and helped to spark my interest in learning more about other Americans like me, their experiences abroad and their motivations for going. The research project I am about to present to you is the product of this passionate interest.

It is a universally understood fact that the world we live in is growing increasingly more connected each day. As a result there is a parallel need for cross-cultural understanding and awareness amongst people. One important way of helping develop and encourage these characteristics is through study abroad. As students learn to adapt in a new culture, complete with new ideas, languages and outlooks on life, they also learn to understand the new group. They are, as Alfred Scheutz (1944) puts it, “strangers” in a foreign country who begin with an abstract and often inaccurate idea of what’s out there, “but upon arrival the new cultural pattern acquires an environmental character. Its remoteness changes into proximity; its vacant frames become occupied by vivid experiences; its anonymous contents turn into definite social situations” (p. 503). Experiences like these are vital in the quest for peace and understanding worldwide. Based on the discussion thus far one could assume all students would be going abroad. In fact, statistics are showing an increase of this phenomenon is occurring worldwide, and the United States is no exception. However, despite these record increases in the amount of American students going abroad in recent years, the numbers remain alarmingly low when compared to other countries. Why is the number so low? What barriers do American students face when deciding to go abroad? For those who do go abroad, what motivates them to do so? What factors are considered when deciding the destination country? These questions lead me to the purpose of this paper which is exploratory and is carried by the following two main research questions:

***What are the motivations which lead American university students to study abroad?***

***What are the motivations which lead these students to choose Norway as their destination?***

In order to answer these questions we must first define study abroad, learn more about the background of these students, and determine what is involved in their decision-making process. Therefore, the structure of this paper begins with an overview of study abroad in chapter 2, including a definition of the concept and a discussion of its current role and importance in today's world. Next, a discussion of study abroad in an American context will be provided and will include a brief discussion of some dispositions held by the country and its citizens, along with some key barriers many American students face when attempting to study abroad. Then, an introduction to Norway as a country of destination for study abroad will be provided.

Chapter 3 will begin with a brief overview of some previous studies done on my topic, followed by a discussion on how to conceptualize the decision-making process students undergo when considering study abroad. This discussion will introduce the background, motivations and influences that both affect and shape the decision. Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune's theory of *Mobility Capital* will be used to help understand more about the backgrounds of students and how they contribute to the eventual motivating factors which lead them to go abroad. Bourdieu's idea of *Cultural Capital* will also be incorporated into this discussion. *Intrinsic* and *Extrinsic* motivation, two types discussed by Deci and Ryan, will be used to define motivation in the context of this paper. This will be combined with an application of Erik Canton and Richard Venniker's *Consumption* and *Investment* motives for undergoing higher education to the context of American students going abroad for study. In addition, the theories of *Human Capital* and *Signaling* will be applied and used as a tool to help learn more about the personal and professional motivations for students to go abroad.

The 4<sup>th</sup> chapter provides an introduction to the study used to help answer the key research questions that carry this paper. It will also present the study design, research and data collection methods, provide an overview of the participants involved, and discuss the limitations of the chosen methods.

Chapter 5 will be devoted to analyzing the data obtained using the chosen methodology. The presentation of the data will be divided and analyzed based on the two main research questions presented above. References to the theories presented above will be

made when appropriate. Finally, chapter 6 will discuss the relevance of the study, and provide reflections and implications. Let us now begin with a definition and discussion of study abroad.

## 2 Study Abroad: An Overview

### 2.1 Defining Study Abroad

It is important to first define the concept of study abroad before moving any further in this paper. Although this can be done in many ways, for the purpose of this study it will be defined as any for-credit educational experience performed outside the borders of the participant's home country. It is well known amongst universities and current and potential students that education undertaken abroad is becoming increasingly relevant in today's society. Although Philip Altbach (2004) asserts that "students have always traveled abroad to study, and scholars have always worked outside their home countries" (*Globalization and the University: Myths and Realities in an Unequal World*, p. 5), there is an even greater focus on study abroad today as a result of globalization and the subsequent internationalization of institutions such as the university. In the first chapter of the book entitled "*Globalization, Trade Liberalization, and Higher Education in North America*," Clyde Barrow (2004) defines globalization as "a variety of economic, cultural, social, and political trends that are each extending the boundaries of the world's social systems beyond the borders of its nation states" (p.1). As the world becomes more connected through these trends, institutions and even individuals must change as well in order to adapt. The university is one such institution greatly affected by globalization. This is discussed by Altbach and Knight (2007) who explain that "the international activities of universities dramatically expanded in volume, scope and complexity during the past two decades. These activities range from traditional study abroad programs, allowing students to learn about other cultures, to providing access to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demand. Other activities stress upgrading the international perspectives and skills of students, enhancing foreign language programs, and providing cross-cultural understanding" (*The Internationalization of Higher Education: Myths and Realities*, p. 290). These changes are examples of the internationalization of higher education institutions. "Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions – and even individuals – to cope with the global academic environment" (Altbach and Knight, *The Internationalization of Higher Education: Myths and Realities*, p. 290). The increasing popularity or even necessity



of studying abroad is one area that has grown in importance in response to globalization and the internationalization of higher education. In this chapter's following pages I will first discuss who is going abroad and where they are going. The focus will be on the OECD countries only which will be explained below. Next I will provide an overview of study abroad in the United States as it stands today. Finally, I will introduce Norway as a destination for study abroad.

## 2.2 Who Studies Abroad and Where?

It's no secret that in recent years the number of students in higher education choosing to go abroad for study has been rapidly increasing. According to *Education at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, "3.0 million tertiary students were enrolled outside their country of citizenship, of whom 2.5 million (83.5%) studied in the OECD area" (p.312). I have opted to focus solely on the OECD and partner countries for two reasons. First, both the United States and Norway are members of the OECD, and second, the most popular destination countries for study abroad amongst OECD students are also OECD or partner countries.

So where do these students come from? Asian students form the largest group of international students enrolled in countries reporting data to the OECD or the UNESCO Institute for statistics: 48.2% in all reporting destinations. They are followed by Europeans (24.9%), particularly EU citizens (16.9%). Students from Africa account for 10.5% of all international students, while those from North America account for only 3.8%. Finally, students from South America represent 5.4% of the total. Altogether, 31.2% of international students enrolled in the OECD area originate from another OECD country. The top country of origin is China with 16.3% of all international students enrolled in the OECD area (*Education at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, pp. 318-320).

And where do these students go? Again, the concept of study abroad is defined here as any for-credit educational experience performed outside the participant's home country. Therefore, the possibilities for a destination are nearly endless for potential students. However, there are certain countries that remain more popular than others. *Education at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators* (p. 13) also gives an overview of the top destinations for

study abroad amongst students in OECD member countries. The table on the following page shows the countries and the total number of students:

Table 2.1

<b>Top 10 Destination Countries, 2007</b>	<b>Total Number of Students</b>
1. United States	209,668
2. United Kingdom	141,443
3. Germany	104,930
4. France	50,232
5. Austria	29,600
6. Belgium	28,295
7. Switzerland	27,774
8. Australia	27,473
9. Japan	27,364
10. Canada	26,049

Now that we have briefly looked at the basics of who studies abroad and where they go, let's get a bit more specific and discuss the two countries in question: The U.S. and Norway.

## 2.3 The U.S. Case

The United States of America, like all other countries in today's world, has been forced to cope with and adapt to the changing global climate. As discussed earlier, globalization and internationalization are real and are greatly affecting the country, both domestically and internationally. One area where the U.S. needs to adapt is higher education. "The general trend towards freely circulating capital, goods and services, coupled with changes in the openness of labor markets, has translated into growing demands for an international dimension of education and training. Indeed, as world economies become increasingly inter-connected, international skills have grown in importance for operating on a global scale" (Education at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators, p. 310). One way of ensuring an internationally-minded population is to promote and increase the levels of study abroad, which is what the U.S. has been doing. According to NAFSA<sup>1</sup>, "in 2007 both houses of congress introduced the senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act to establish a national study abroad program that will inspire students and universities alike to expand their horizons through study abroad. In ten years time, through the establishment of the Simon Foundation, one million, demographically representative of the diversity present on our college campuses, will study abroad annually on quality programs in diverse regions of the world" (2007, Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act). This act builds on the recommendations provided by the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program which was created in 2004 with the hope to significantly increase opportunity for American students to study overseas. The concept of a Lincoln Fellowship was created and championed by the late Senator Paul Simon, who believed that a more internationally educated citizenry would make the United States 'more understanding of the rest of the world' and would create 'a base of public opinion that would encourage responsible action" (2007, Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act).

It seems that these actions have paid off. According to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) Open Doors 2009 report, a record number of U.S. students are choosing to study abroad, reflecting a strong commitment to the value of an international academic

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<sup>1</sup> NAFSA: Association of International Educators is a U.S. member organization promoting international education and providing professional development opportunities in the field.

experience to prepare them to live and work in a more global society. Open Doors 2009 reports the number of Americans studying abroad increased by 8.5% to 262,416 in the 2007/08 academic year. This latest increase builds on decades of steady growth, with four times as many U.S. students participating in study abroad in 2007/08 than in 1987/88 (Open Doors 2009).

As promising as all of this sounds, and despite these record numbers, the United States currently maintains an alarmingly uneven global ranking when it comes to study abroad statistics. In fact, these record numbers add up to “only 3 percent of U.S. college students in 4-year programs in education abroad each year” (Brustein, 2010). Therefore, even though the United States hosts the most international students annually among the OECD countries (as shown in figure 2.1 above), it sends one of the lowest amounts of students abroad. Below is a table which shows the top 20 sending countries worldwide as of 2009:

Table 2.2

<b>Top 20 Sending Countries, 2009</b>	<b>Source: Open Doors 2009</b>
1. India	11. Nepal
2. China	12. Germany
3. South Korea	13. Brazil
4. Canada	14. Thailand
5. Japan	15. Indonesia
6. Taiwan	16. United Kingdom
7. Mexico	17. Hong Kong
8. Turkey	18. France
9. Vietnam	19. Colombia
10. Saudi Arabia	20. Nigeria

So why are there so few Americans studying abroad? In an attempt to shed some light on this question, it is necessary to first look more closely into the country and its people. Both geography and the position of American culture, politics and the media are important elements which can be related to why American students are not going abroad for study. Let's begin with geography.

### *Geography*

The most important fact to present here is that The United States is a vast country with an area of approximately 3.6 million square miles. This vastness can have a significant impact on the outlook of the population. For example, it takes approximately four and half hours to travel from one coast to another by plane. It is therefore difficult for many Americans to fathom going abroad due to the distance and costs involved to do so. This leads citizens to seek change domestically as opposed to internationally, whether it is for travel, change of scenery or for educational purposes.

European countries on the other hand are culturally and linguistically diverse and have much less distance between them. Therefore, the population does not need to go far in order to experience something new. The shorter distance also generally means that lower costs and less time are required in order to experience a completely new language and way of life. It can be argued, therefore, that the relative isolation and sheer vastness of the United States has lead to a culture full of ethnocentrism due to the fact that less people are exposed to foreign cultures. In addition, the idea that all things American are the best and most important, a central element of ethnocentrism, is prevalent. This leads me to another aspect of the United States that should be mentioned: the power and influence of its culture, politics and media.

### *Culture, Politics and the Media*

The ethnocentrism present in the consciousness of the American people is further reinforced by the power and influence of the country's culture, politics and media. As the United States is considered one of the premier economies in the world, it holds a significant amount of influence among it. You cannot pick up a newspaper worldwide without reading

headlines about the goings on there, whether it is related to its culture, politics or media. American movies, television and music are some of the largest and most expansive industries in the world. This creates a culture that is in a way, well, full of itself. The American politicians and media also contribute to this mentality as they perpetuate the view that the U.S. is “the center of the world” with the most important and influential culture. This, unfortunately, creates a mass population of internally-minded citizens. When this is combined with the geographic elements discussed above it severely limits exposure and interest in foreign cultures. In addition, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath have added even more fuel to the fire as the fear and “us versus them” mentality have become even stronger.

Another side of this issue has been created by events like the Iraq war and the presidency of George W. Bush. Both can be argued as having significantly altered the world’s view of the United States and the American people. Many Americans are aware of this fact which has led to the development of a fear of how other countries view them or might treat them if they were to go abroad. In fact, I cannot count how many times I have been asked questions after returning from abroad like “what are the feelings about Americans over there?” Or, more directly, “do they hate Americans over there?”

Another factor that is affected by the power and influence of the American culture and media is the perceived quality and prestige of its universities. If you look at some of the more well-known global university rankings such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities compiled by Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2009) or the Times Higher Education ranking (Top 200 World Universities, 2009) you will see that U.S. universities are consistently listed as some of the top universities. In fact, U.S. universities comprised nearly all of the top 20 positions in both lists for 2009. This perceived prestige of universities like Harvard and Yale lead American students to seek higher education domestically as opposed to internationally, and helps to reinforce the mentality that the U.S. contains the best the world has to offer. This also influences the labor market as foreign degrees may be met with confusion and considered obscure by employers, thus reinforcing the need to study domestically.

Based on all of the elements discussed in this section thus far it can be inferred that it takes a certain type of American to want to study abroad. And even then they will meet many barriers along the way. I would now like to move on to discuss more about these barriers

which I have divided into three categories: *Financial, Knowledge and Institutional*. The barriers discussed here will be revisited later and included in the analysis in chapter 5.

### *Financial Barriers*

The most important financial barrier affecting American students wishing to go abroad is the overall high costs of higher education. These costs not only include tuition fees, but also books, other study fees, and living (whether on a university campus, alone or with family). On top of that are any fee requirements for the study abroad program and the travel and living expenses associated with it. This burden is made even heavier by the limited availability of government aid for study abroad apart from student loans. Incurring debt has been shown as a significant deterrent for potential students to enter higher education. This can also be applied to students wishing to study abroad. In addition, unless a student chooses a study abroad program offered by the university (and not an outside organization), it is difficult to apply government aid to the study program costs because they are no longer handled by the student's home university. These factors make it extremely difficult for students wishing to go abroad to do so.

### *Knowledge Barriers*

Knowledge barriers are strongly related to the discussion above about the geographic and cultural positions of the United States. A fear of the unknown is one important knowledge barrier faced by American students and can be a significant deterrent for them. A second is a lack of proficiency in the foreign language required for the desired study abroad program. These are both effects of the lack of exposure Americans have to foreign cultures already mentioned.

### *Institutional Barriers*

Institutional barriers are those related to the university the student attends. A lack of comprehensive and accurate information about study abroad programs and their logistic

elements offered by the university is one important institutional barrier students may face. Examples of common questions students may have about studying abroad include “can credit be received for courses taken abroad? What programs and courses are offered by my university or elsewhere? Will I be able to graduate on time if I study abroad?” If this information is not provided to them it can prevent them from going abroad altogether. We’ll see later on in this paper if the participants involved in my study faced any of the types of barriers presented here.

In addition to what has been already mentioned in this section, another key reason why a large majority of American students are not studying abroad could be explained by looking within the institutions. Even though there may be will at the national level to make international education a priority, it still must be accepted and applied at the institutional level. According to a 2008 press release by the American Council on Education, despite ongoing efforts to broaden global knowledge and understanding, their analysis finds that “internationalization is not a high priority on most college campuses.” A key finding is that “many institutions do not see internationalization as integral to their identity or strategy. Less than 40 percent of institutions made specific reference to international or global education in their mission statements” (Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses, 2008). Moreover, “the percentage of colleges and universities that require a course with an international or global focus as part of the general education curriculum dipped from 41 percent in 2001 to 37 percent in 2006. Fewer than one in five had a foreign-language requirement for all undergraduates” (Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses, 2008). This is discouraging, especially when you compare it to many European countries which begin teaching foreign languages to their students during primary school. This lack of commitment to internationalization from U.S. universities certainly is and will continue to be a hindrance for the country and for American students.

Although many American students are never able to do a study abroad program due to the numerous reasons discussed above, there is still a small percentage that can. Let’s now turn our attention to those students. For how long do they study and where do they go? Open Doors 2009 states the following regarding the length of study abroad programs amongst American students:

“About 40% of students studying abroad do so through mid-length programs, while 56% of U.S. students choose short-term programs (including summer, January term and any



program of 2 to 8 weeks during the academic year). Short-term programs serve the largest number of Americans studying abroad, including community college students and others whose financial or academic needs preclude a longer stay; 68% of students at Associates Degree granting institutions who studied abroad did so for 8 weeks or less. Mid-length programs (one semester, one quarter or two quarters) allow for deeper immersion into host cultures and increased opportunity for language acquisition. A little more than 4% of study abroad students spend a full academic or calendar year abroad” (Open Doors 2009).

The figure below shows what percentage of the total stays abroad were short-term, mid-length and long-term.

Table 2.3

<b>Duration of Study Abroad, 2007/08</b>	
Source: Open Doors 2009	
<b>Duration</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
Short-term (summer, January term, or eight weeks or less during academic year)	56.3
Mid-length (one or two quarters or one semester)	39.5
Long-term (academic or calendar year)	4.2

So where do these students go? The table below lists the top 25 destination countries for American students in 2007/2008:

Table 2.4

### Leading 25 Destinations 2007/08

Source: Open Doors 2009

Rank	Destination	2007/08
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>262,416</b>
1	UK	33,333
2	Italy	30,670
3	Spain	25,212
4	France	17,336
5	China	13,165
6	Australia	11,042
7	Mexico	9,928
8	Germany	8,253
9	Ireland	6,881
10	Costa Rica	6,096
11	Japan	5,710
12	Argentina	4,109
13	Greece	3,847
14	South Africa	3,700
15	Czech Republic	3,417
16	Austria	3,356
17	India	3,146
18	Ecuador	2,814
19	Chile	2,739
20	Brazil	2,723
21	New Zealand	2,629
22	Israel	2,322
23	Netherlands	2,038
24	Switzerland	1,942
25	Russia	1,857

It is interesting and relevant to discover that there are no Nordic countries listed in the top 25 destination countries for Americans studying abroad. What then are the motivations for students to choose Norway as their destination country? This question will be discussed in chapter 6, but first let's take a closer look at Norway.

## 2.4 Destination: Norway

According to DBH, The Database for Statistics on Higher Education, there were a total of 12, 266 international students in Norwegian higher education in 2009. Of that total, 7,857 were enrolled in universities (there are seven universities in Norway) (*NSD: Database for statistikk om høgre utdanning*). Which nationalities were most prevalent amongst these students? This was presented by SIU, The Center for International Higher Education in a 2009 survey. According to the survey, the top 12 most represented countries studying in Norwegian higher education were Germany (16.2%), France (9.1%), China (4.8%), The United States (4.3%), Spain (3.6%), Russia (3.0%), The Netherlands (2.7%), Italy (2.6%), Poland (2.4%), The Czech Republic (2.2 %), Canada (2.1%) and the UK (2.0%) (Study in Norway, p. 4). As you can see, American students represented only slightly more than 4 percent of the total international students in 2009.

This is discouraging, particularly when the Norwegian National Database for Higher Education (DBH) reports that the total number of U.S. students in Norway in 2009 was 307 (*NSD: Database for statistikk om høgre utdanning*, 2009). The numbers in this database are submitted by the institutions themselves and only include students who do for-credit coursework and stay more than three months. They also include both self-financing and scholarship recipients, and undergraduate and graduate students (up to the Master's level). This number is a very small percentage of the total amount of Americans studying abroad worldwide. Of these 307 American students in Norway, 107 of them were studying at the University of Oslo (UiO) in 2009 (*NSD: Database for statistikk om høgre utdanning*, 2009). As you will see in chapter 4, the focus group of my research study will be comprised of students at the University of Oslo.

The reasons for the low percentage of American students abroad discussed in the previous section make Norway a particularly interesting country to focus on. It is relatively unknown to Americans who tend to have only very specific knowledge of select European countries such as the UK, France, Spain, Germany and Italy. These countries receive the most exposure due to their histories in relation to the United States, the tourism industry and “romanticism” of these countries shown in the media (film, television, travel books etc.), and the offering of these languages in U.S. secondary schools. Norway, on the other hand, is a

seemingly isolated and “obscure” country in Northern Europe that many American youth have never heard of. This can easily be discovered when asking Americans about Norway. A common reaction is “isn’t that near Sweden?” I have even heard such amusing responses as “isn’t that the capital of Sweden or Scandinavia?” In fact, Sweden may be the only Nordic country that many Americans are familiar with, possibly as a result of the international success of its pop culture and music. The Nordic countries are not a focus in the history or social studies courses offered in U.S. public secondary schools, and were certainly not mentioned at all when I was a secondary school student. Therefore, it is intriguing to learn about the reasons why certain students do end up choosing this country as their study abroad destination. I would like to begin by discussing some hypotheses I had before beginning the study about some of these reasons why students want to go to Norway, which will be tested later on in chapter 5.

*Hypothesis 1: Students don’t choose Norway, but end up there for more circumstantial reasons.*

This hypothesis is based on the idea that Americans have very little knowledge of Norway and would therefore only end up there as a result of circumstances unrelated to a specific interest in the country. These circumstances could include the availability of a scholarship or a certain program of study.

*Hypothesis 2: Students who go to Norway have Norwegian heritage.*

This hypothesis assumes interest in studying in Norway is a result of a connection to Norwegian heritage through family. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006 American Community Survey, there are currently an estimated 4,669,516 Americans with Norwegian ancestry in the United States. This population is most prominent in the upper Midwest and Northwest regions of the country based on previous bursts of immigration. (2006, *U.S. Census Bureau: American Fact Finder*).

*Hypothesis 3: Students who go to Norway have a specific interest in the Norwegian culture, language, or political system.*

Another hypothesis involves an interest in the Norwegian culture, language and/or politics. Because there is a general lack of interest in and knowledge about Norway, it might be assumed that students who choose to go there have a specific interest in learning about the Norwegian culture, politics or language. Many students with interests in universal health care and education, socialism or other leftist views not prevalent in U.S. society or politics may be drawn to a country like Norway. Also, an interest in Norwegian folklore or Viking culture may also be an interest students would go to Norway to explore.

*Hypothesis 4: Students who go to Norway sought out English-language programs or courses.*

A fourth hypothesis involves the availability of English-language programs and courses. As Norwegian is not a common language spoken amongst Americans, nor is it commonly taught at the secondary or higher education level, one can assume American students hoping to study there would need programs and courses offered in English.

*Hypothesis 5: Students who go to Norway were attracted by the absence of tuition fees.*

A final hypothesis relates to an absence of tuition fees as a motivation for choosing to study in Norway. According to Education at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators, “in Norway, tuition fees are equal for domestic and international students; no fees in public institutions, but fees in some private institutions” (2009, pp. 316-317). This makes Norway unique in Europe in this regard. Therefore, Americans can receive quite a benefit from this. This can certainly be perceived as a probable motivation to study there, especially when tuition rates in the United States are so high and are continuing to rise as a result of the ever-increasing autonomy of U.S. universities and the current global economic crisis. However, my hypothesis assumes that Americans are unaware of this fact about the Norwegian higher education system, and therefore it will not be a factor in their decision to study.

Having learned a bit more about international students and the amount of Americans studying there I would like to discuss an action Norway is currently taking to help strengthen

North American and Norwegian connections in higher education and attract more students from this region to its universities. In 2008, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research created a plan called *The North America Strategy for Higher Education* with the goal “to strengthen the connections between Norwegian and North American higher education institutions” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2008). This is an addition to the 2006 strategy which focused on strengthening collaborations in the areas of science and technology. The specific goals of this strategy, which aim to be implemented between 2008 and 2011, are collaboration at the government level, strengthening student exchange, establishing partnership schemes, and strengthening information and network arenas. This plan is an example of Norway’s attempts to adapt and respond to globalization and internationalization related to higher education. Based on the low numbers of American students in Norway today this action is a step in the right direction.

An important organization worth mentioning here is the Norway America Association (NORAM), whose goal is promoting educational and cultural exchange between Norway and North America since 1919. The organization offers undergraduate and graduate level study scholarships for both Norwegians and Americans, offers a summer course for Norwegian teachers looking to learn more about the U.S. and work on their English skills, and an internship program in the U.S. for Norwegians.

Another important agreement between the two countries is the U.S.-Norway Fulbright Foundation for Educational Exchange. Through this foundation, each year approximately 35 Norwegians receive grants to study or conduct research in the US, and approximately 25 Americans receive grants to do the same in Norway. Both the NORAM and the Fulbright programs are examples of efforts funded by the U.S. and Norway to promote educational exchange between them.

Now that I have provided an overview of study abroad and its current status in the United States and Norway, I would like to move on to a discussion about how to conceptualize the decision-making process involved in choosing to study abroad and where to go.

# 3 Conceptualizing the Decision-Making Process

There are many factors which contribute to the decision-making process to study abroad and choose a destination. Before introducing the key concepts I will use to define the students, motivations and influences involved in this process, I will briefly discuss some studies that have been conducted on the motivations for studying abroad and for choosing Norway as the destination.

## 3.1 Previous Studies

The first study was conducted by Sánchez, Fornerino and Zhang and was presented in their 2006 article entitled *Motivations and the Intent to Study Abroad among U.S., French and Chinese Students*. The study sought to “analyze the relationship between students’ motivations and their intention to participate in study abroad programs” (2006, p. 27). The study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative research methods and “surveyed U.S., Chinese and French business students” (2006, p. 27) about the motivations and barriers involved in their desire to study abroad. The first phase of the study was qualitative and involved distributing an open-ended questionnaire to 49 students at an institution located in each country. The surveys asked why the students chose to study in a country other than their home country or country of residence. The responses provided were then used to create statements used in the next phase of the project which would be quantitative. In this phase the students were asked to provide on a level from 1 to 5 how much they agree or disagree with the statements created from the first phase. The most important motivations found by the American students (in order), as categorized by the researchers, were “search for a new experience (e.g. experience another culture, travel, international experience), improve a professional situation (e.g. benefit future career, be richer, make a professional work connection), improve a social situation (e.g. please parents, improve parents’ social recognition, freely practice religious beliefs), search for liberty/pleasure (e.g. have fun,

experience a more exotic life, live independently) and learn other languages” (2006, pp. 35-37).

Regarding barriers, the most important listed by the American students (in order), as categorized by the researchers, were familial (e.g. difficult to be away from family, miss family and friends, too many obligations at home), financial (too expensive and requires going into debt, study abroad is a luxury), psychological (e.g. wary of new places, no friends have ever studied abroad), and social (e.g. friends previously in the country) (2006, p. 39). The motivations and barriers found in this study will be compared later to those found in my study in chapter 5.

A second study, conducted in 2009 by the International Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU), focused on the motivations for students to choose Norway as their destination for study abroad. A survey was distributed to all of the international students at 20 universities and colleges throughout Norway. The four most important motivations cited by the students were the availability of English programs and courses, the quality of education, the reputation of studies and research, and the Norwegian nature. Other less important factors were love, the cost of living, the Norwegian welfare system, and job opportunities after graduation. Another key finding was that the absence of tuition fees was not among the most significant factors listed (Study in Norway, 2009, p. 13).

Having just briefly discussed some previous studies conducted on motivations for studying abroad and for choosing Norway, I would like to move on to an outline of the conceptual framework that I have chosen for my study

## 3.2 Students

In the book entitled *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*, Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2002) introduces the concept of *Mobility Capital*. She defines this concept as “a sub-component of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad.” There are four main components of mobility capital: “family and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaptation which serves as an initiation, and finally the personality features of the potential wanderer” (p. 52). These



components are used to identify the student's level of mobility capital before their departure. Why is mobility capital important? It is used to distinguish those who go abroad from those who do not and Murphy-Lejeune argues that "the main difference between student travelers and their peers rests in the acquisition" (2002, p. 51) of it. Therefore, those students who go abroad are assumed to have higher levels of mobility capital than those who do not. Although she applies this concept to European students in her study, it can also be used for this study involving American students going to Norway. Mobility Capital will be used to conceptualize the participants in this study and the presentation of the data will be structured using its components.

### 3.3 Motivations

While Mobility Capital is important because it helps identify factors present in students' lives which lead to their decisions to go abroad, it is not the only element involved in the decision-making process. In addition, the student must also have the motivation to do so. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), "to be motivated means *to be moved* to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated" (*Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions*, p. 54). They continue on to state that "people not only have different amounts, but also different kinds of motivation. That is, they vary not only in *level* of motivation (i.e., how much motivation), but also in the *orientation* of that motivation (i.e., what type of motivation). Orientation of motivation concerns the underlying attitudes and goals that give rise to action – that is, it concerns the *why* of actions" (*Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions*, p. 54). So which "types" of motivation are present in the decision to study abroad?

Deci and Ryan also identify two relevant types of motivation which can be applied to university students deciding to go abroad. Those motivations are *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. "*Intrinsic motivation* is defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge rather than because of external prods, pressures, or rewards" (*Intrinsic*

and *Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions*, 2000, p. 56). “*Extrinsic motivation* is a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome. Extrinsic motivation thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself, rather than its instrumental value” (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p.60).

In the study *Higher Education Reform: Getting the incentives Right*, Erik Canton and Richard Venniker (2001) describe two relevant types of motivation which lead students to enter higher education. They state that “students participate in higher education for two basic reasons: *consumption* and *investment*. Under the consumption motive, higher education generates immediate benefits related to students’ curiosity and the pleasure to learn. Under the investment motive, students incur the costs of education (both time and money) in order to enlarge their future expected income” (p. 35). Although these two types of motivations were initially meant for students entering higher education, they can also be applied to students wishing to study abroad. The “investment” involved in the original theory is considered economic as its expected benefit is higher earnings.

Based on the definitions of the four motivations described above, a relationship can be established between them. A consumption motive, which benefits a student’s curious nature and desire to learn, can also be considered an intrinsic motivation, which is an action performed solely based on the satisfaction one can receive from it.

An investment motive, on the other hand, involves an exchange of time and money in return for an expectation of earning higher income later on. This motive can therefore also be considered an extrinsic motivation, which promotes an action done for its instrumental value. In addition, this investment could be done with an expectation of a non-monetary return such as increased knowledge.

The idea that investing in educational qualifications can result in future monetary or non-monetary benefits or gains is also present in other theories. The first, Human Capital, is discussed by Jacob Mincer (1989) in his work entitled *Human Capital and the Labor Market: A Review of Current Research*. In it, he states that “the central idea is that human capacities are in large part acquired and developed through informal and formal education at home and at school, and through training, experience, and mobility in the labor market. These activities are costly; they involve both direct expenses and earnings or consumption foregone by

families, students, trainees, and by workers in the process of labor mobility. Because benefits derived from these activities accrue mainly in the future, the costly acquisition of learned capacities can be viewed as an investment” (p. 27). Although this theory considers only education training and experience acquired domestically, it is also relevant when applied to that which is attained abroad. Based on this definition it can be determined that the theory of Human Capital is closely related to the Investment motives and Extrinsic motivations described above.

A second concept, Cultural Capital, is also connected to the theories and motivations outlined thus far. Cultural Capital, first introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) can be described as acquired non-monetary social or cultural assets. Bourdieu (1986) also asserts that this capital “is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications” (*The Forms of Capital*, p. 16). Bourdieu then explains that cultural capital can exist in the Embodied, Objectified, or Institutionalized states. All three states are relevant here. Embodied, or inherited, is linked to Mobility Capital as they involve assets passed on to a person by their family. The Objectified, or physical goods such as books or art, are also related to Mobility Capital in the same way. The Institutionalized state is also relevant here as it constitutes educational qualifications, which can then be converted to economic capital and exchanged in the labor market. These educational qualifications can also be called Informational Capital.

Cultural and Informational Capital are linked to Human Capital as both involve an investment in educational qualifications that can later be exchanged for economic gain. Martin Munk (2009) discusses another type of gain that can be obtained in his article entitled *Transnational Investments in Informational Capital: A Case Study of Denmark, France and Sweden*. He states that “acquisitions of informational capital are considered as investments, which in turn can be reconverted into membership of a particular network or later social position” (p.6). Therefore, educational qualifications can also be sought as an investment for prestige or other social benefit or gain. It can be argued that this is particularly true in the case of education acquired abroad as it is often considered prestigious in many countries. The U.S. is an example of such a country. Because higher education is so expensive there, education abroad is often considered a luxury reserved for the privileged or higher classes. The benefits of education acquired abroad are also discussed by Wiers-Jenssen and Try (2005) in their article entitled *Labor Market Outcomes of Higher Education Undertaken Abroad*. They state

that “graduates educated abroad may possess extra-curricular skills, such as language fluency and cultural competence, which are likely to be acknowledged as an advantage by employers” (p. 684). In addition, “education from abroad could signal possession of certain personal characteristics, such as independence, initiative, open-mindedness and social and symbolic capital. Graduates from abroad could be a selected group, and the differences we find in labor market outcome could be ascribed to such social and personality traits” (p.684). By this definition, Cultural and Informational Capital can be considered an Investment Motive and an Extrinsic Motivation.

A third theory, Signaling, is also relevant to this discussion. In his article *Job Market Signaling*, Michael Spence (1973) describes the signaling theory. The basic principle is that before hiring, employers are uncertain of the productive capabilities of an individual, and therefore must rely on initially observable characteristics and attributes of that individual. The relevant attribute here is an educational qualification or informational capital. This qualification could also have been obtained abroad which therefore relates it to this discussion of study abroad. This qualification then acts as a signal for the employer. Signaling theory can therefore be considered an investment motive or an extrinsic motivation.

Based on the literature and concepts presented thus far, the motivations of students to go abroad can be divided into two categories: *Personal* and *Professional*. *Personal* motivations can be related to either the investment or consumption motives described above because the student could seek personal enrichment and growth or simply the pleasure from learning. These motivations could therefore be extrinsic or intrinsic in nature. *Professional* motivations, on the other hand, are related to investment motives because the intention is to increase job prospects or earned income in the future. It is therefore of extrinsic nature.

### 3.4 Influences

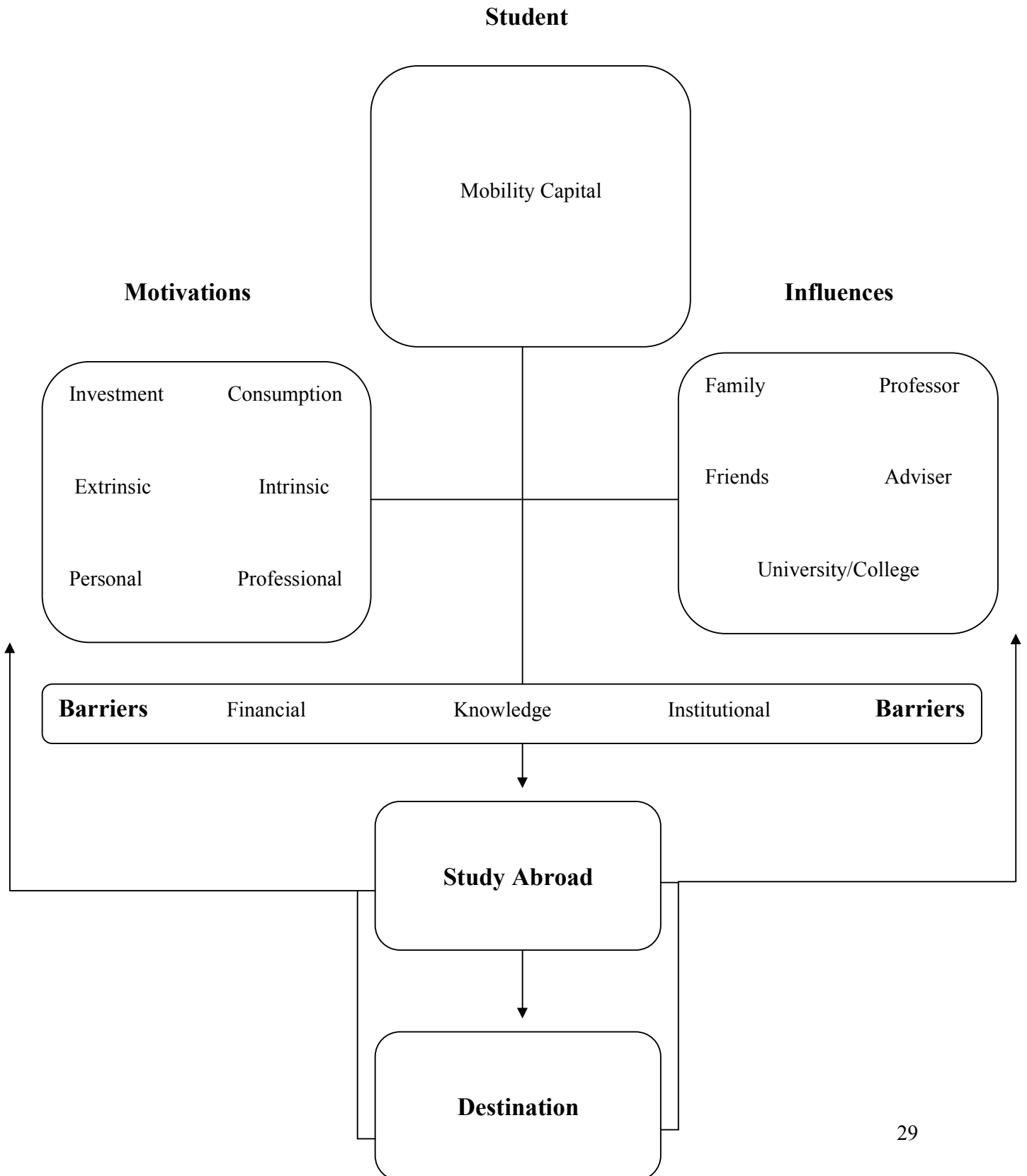
Along with the mobility capital and motivations described above, influences are also important in the decision-making process. These can come from family or friends who went abroad before the student, helped expose them to another culture, or simply encouraged them to do so themselves. As you saw above, family is also listed as a component of mobility capital, and can therefore be included in both categories. The student’s university can be

another strong influence for them. There, the students interact with international students, take internationally-oriented courses, and discuss friends' previous international experiences. In addition, professors and advisers can encourage students to go abroad and even recommend certain programs or countries that would fit the student well. These influences can therefore also be linked to the Mobility Capital and Cultural Capital theories highlighted above because family, friends, and experiences in university all contribute to the various levels of capital present in an individual. Finally, the influences can also have an impact on the motivations of the participants.

The diagram on the following page presents the conceptual framework for the decision-making process students go through when considering going abroad for study and choosing a destination. Each participant acquires varying levels of mobility capital, motivations and influences based on their own personal experiences. These factors combine together at various stages as just described, often hindered by barriers, and foster the decision-making process. The experiences earned from studying abroad will continue to change the participants as well, thus continuously affecting their mobility capital and motivations. Following the diagram, I will begin to focus on the methodology I chose to help carry out my research.

Figure 3.1

### The Decision-Making Process



# 4 Methodology

## 4.1 Study Design

When developing a design for a research study it is important to determine which methods would elicit the most relevant data and produce the best analysis based on the purpose of the study and the chosen research questions. As my study is exploratory and seeks to learn more about the experiences and motivations of American university students, qualitative methods were deemed most appropriate.

The data collection method I opted to use in this research study is the semi-structured interview. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (The Art of Hearing Data, p. 4). I decided to use this qualitative research method because it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and experiences of the students I interviewed than what would be allowed by a quantitative method such as a questionnaire. A questionnaire would be limiting for several reasons.

The first limitation is related to access. The fact that the University of Oslo is not legally allowed to provide any contact information for enrolled students makes it difficult to access and distribute a questionnaire. And even if I were able to distribute the questionnaire it would still lead to a second important limitation of the method, which is the limited variation of responses that can be drawn from the respondents. With generally closed questions and less room for explanation and detail it does not allow for nuances, which will inevitably exist. In addition, the quality of responses relies heavily on the meticulous wording and ordering of the questions. If a question is not clear enough or does not garner an adequate response, it can completely throw off the analysis or render some responses useless. On the other hand, an interview setting with a semi-structured set of questions is much better suited to this type of study. And as explained in chapter 1, the study aims to discover the motivations which lead American students to study abroad and choose Norway as their destination. As there are certainly many variances in the backgrounds and experiences of the students, I opted to use

the qualitative semi-structured interview as my research method. Once this decision was made I then had to decide how to choose the participants.

The method used to gather the students to be interviewed is called the *snowball method*. “In snowball sampling, the researcher collects data on the few members of the target population he or she can locate, then asks those individuals to provide the information needed to locate other members of that population whom they happen to know. ‘Snowball’ refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects” (Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, p. 185). This method was chosen due to the inability to gain access to the contact information of American students at the University of Oslo through the university. I asked some fellow colleagues if they knew any American bachelor or master level students attending the university and was able to get in touch with a few. I then asked those students if they could provide me with some others, thus creating a “snowball” effect. With this method I was able to find seven students who agreed to participate in the study.

Once the students were chosen, I created an interview guide (See Appendix B). The interview guide was based on the conceptual framework described above. Once I gained access to the contact information of my interviewees, I emailed them each an introductory letter (See Appendix A) which included information about me and my study to ensure they were informed prior to our interview. It was also done to help them become a bit more comfortable with the whole process. We then setup a time to meet and conduct the interview. Each interview lasted an average of thirty minutes and was recorded using a digital audio recorder. In total, the interview process took approximately three weeks to complete. I then went back and transcribed each interview and looked for patterns in the responses, which were then categorized using the conceptual framework. The responses were coded using the mobility capital, motivations, influences and barriers discussed above. The findings and their analyses will be presented in following chapter.

## 4.2 The Participants

I have chosen to focus on seven students currently enrolled in a study abroad program at the University of Oslo. The reasons for this focus along with how the group was obtained will be discussed in chapter 5. Meanwhile I have included below a table presenting an



overview of the students who participated in the study. I have included their age, degree level, home university, program of study, and the length of their study abroad program. The participants were informed that their names would remain anonymous for their protection.

Table 4.1

<b>Student</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Degree Level</b>	<b>Home University</b>	<b>Program of Study</b>	<b>Length of Study Abroad</b>
<b>James</b>	23	Bachelor	University of North Dakota	Norwegian	1 Semester
<b>David</b>	20	Bachelor	University of San Francisco	Philosophy	1 Semester
<b>Julie</b>	22	Master	University of Oslo	Culture, Environment and Sustainability	2 Years
<b>Mark</b>	20	Bachelor	University of Maryland-College Park	Environmental Science and Technology	1 Semester
<b>John</b>	21	Bachelor	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	Computer Science	1 Semester
<b>Marie</b>	26	Master	University of Oslo	Nordic Viking and Medieval Culture	2 Years

<b>Lindsay</b>	23	Bachelor	University of Alabama- Huntsville	English and History	1 Semester
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## 4.3 Limitations

There are a few key limitations that arose from my chosen research strategy and methods. First, the number of students I interviewed was restricted to seven due to time constraints. I am fully aware that this small number is not optimal for making generalizations about all students or Americans abroad, or about the hypotheses mentioned throughout this paper. Therefore, this is not the objective or focus of my research. The study is exploratory and its purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of a few Americans studying at the University of Oslo. Although I am unable to draw any grand conclusions based on my research, this study can still be used as a tool to aid in learning about the overall group, and can be built upon by more comprehensive studies.

Also, due to the limited number of Americans studying at the University of Oslo, I made the decision to include all types of university students in this study in hopes it would provide me with a more diverse group of responses. I also wanted to ensure I could find an adequate number of participants. You will see in the following chapter what responses I was able to obtain.

This study is also limited by the fact that the participants were asked to provide insight about their motivations before going abroad, even though they had already been studying in Norway for a few months. This reduces the possibility of receiving accurate responses, as the initial motivations may have changed or become less clear over time, particularly because the students have been adapting to culture shock and life in a foreign environment. However, the amount of time necessary to follow a group of American students from the time they began looking into studying abroad at home up until their point of departure was too great. If given the time, however, it would certainly have been interesting to do so and would make for a rewarding future study. It would also be interesting to follow up with the seven participants

once they have returned home or completed their full degrees at UiO, in order to find out their levels of satisfaction versus their initial motivations.

A final and important limitation is that this study was more or less a self-study, as I am also an American student who chose to study abroad in Norway. This increased the possibility of bias or subjectivity during the process or in the analysis. However, it also created a few advantages, particularly during the interview process. All of the students were more than willing to participate in my study and showed a significant interest in sharing their experiences with me. This was certainly influenced by the fact that I am in a similar situation as they are and am going through similar experiences. Therefore, it helped the participants to feel more at ease discussing their backgrounds, experiences and motivations with me related to going abroad and choosing Norway. They were also just as interested in my experiences as I was in theirs. This allowed for an enriching and rewarding experience for both of us. In addition, being able to share our experiences with someone who understood seemed to be almost therapeutic. Therefore, I feel this allowed for more honest and open responses.

Despite these limitations I feel I was able to succeed in providing an interesting and useful addition to the discourse on study abroad.

# 5 Analyzing the Motivations

Let us now turn our attention to the analysis of the data obtained in the interviews in relation to the main research questions. The definitions of each concept can be found in the framework presentation provided in chapter 4, but a brief overview of each will be provided throughout this chapter as a refresher. I will also include in this chapter an analysis of the barriers introduced in chapter 2.

## 5.1 Mobility Capital

I will begin by analyzing the levels of mobility capital present in the participants prior to undergoing their study abroad experience in Norway as it provides the earliest motivations and influences the participants had and were exposed to. I have chosen to use Murphy-Lejeune’s study as the basis for structuring the results because I found it to be the most comprehensive and relevant to study abroad and to my topic specifically. As discussed in chapter 4, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) asserts that the possession of mobility capital is what separates the students who study abroad from those who do not. Just to review, the key elements which comprise mobility capital are: family and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaptation which serves as an initiation, and finally the personality features of the potential wanderer. Generally speaking the amount of mobility capital varied amongst the participants interviewed in this study. I have included below a table highlighting some key elements of the participants’ mobility capital. Following the table will be a presentation of the interview findings related to this concept.

Table 5.1

<b>Student</b>	<b>Previous Experience Abroad</b>	<b>Language Competency</b>	<b>Proficiency</b>	<b>Family Outside U.S.</b>	<b>Bilingual Family</b>
<b>James</b>	High School, 2 Weeks	Norwegian	Basic	Cousin in Germany	Grandfather (Norwegian)
<b>David</b>	College, 1 Semester	Spanish and French	Basic	None	Cousin (German)
<b>Julie</b>	None	Spanish and German	Basic	None	None
<b>Mark</b>	None	Spanish	Basic	Immediate Family in Australia	None
<b>John</b>	None	Spanish and French	Basic	Distant Relatives in Norway	None
<b>Marie</b>	College, 1 Semester	Spanish and Norwegian	Basic	None	None
<b>Lindsay</b>	College, 3 Months and 5 Weeks	French	Basic	Close Family in the UK	None

### ***Family and Personal History***

According to Murphy-Lejeune (2002), relevant family and personal history comes in the form of international ties or openness of the family and “foreign links come in the shape of direct blood lineage” (Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers, p.

52). The family and personal histories of the participants generally followed a similar pattern. While all of them were aware of their family's heritage, most grew up in small town environments without any international links. When asked about his family's heritage, John stated the following:

*"My dad is  $\frac{3}{4}$  Norwegian and my great grandparents were born in Norway. But my entire immediate family grew up in small town Minnesota so we aren't internationally oriented. None of my immediate family members live outside of the US and none of them are bilingual"*  
(John).

While John was aware of where his family originates from, he grew up in the relative isolation of a small town with no international or bilingual family. Marie had a similar history:

*"There are no international members of my family and no one is bilingual. Everyone in my family is from small town Texas"* (Marie).

One exception to this pattern is Lindsay. While she does live in the relatively small town of Huntsville, Alabama, her family history is unique amongst this group. She explains:

*"My father is English and has dual citizenship so family has always been international"*  
(Lindsay).

These statements made by the students suggest that there are a significant amount of international ties amongst their family and personal histories. This idea can be further illustrated using one additional motivation found amongst the participants of the study that is closely related to mobility capital. This motivation, called "Heritage-Seeking" by Szekely (1998), is discussed by Stacey Bolton Tsantir in her article for the IIE entitled *Heritage Seeking and Education Abroad: A Case Study* where she defines it as "selecting a study abroad venue because of family background—national, religious, cultural or ethnic. Heritage seeking students are drawn to their host country and culture, not because it is unfamiliar and new, but rather because it is somewhat familiar. While most education abroad students expect to be challenged by the culture, heritage seekers often expect to feel a sense of homecoming and acceptance. Heritage seeking deeply affects the program choice process" (IIE Network, 2010). Three students in this study would fall under the category of heritage-seeking: James, John and David. James explains:

*“My grandfather was my main influence to do this program as he is Norwegian and I am studying Norwegian because of him” (James).*

Throughout my interview with James he referred to his Norwegian grandfather as his principle motivation for going abroad and for choosing Norway as his destination country. John had a similar motivation:

*“I have relatives in Norway as my great grandfather was born in Norway and I visited the area where he was born. I wanted to see my last name on a sign somewhere” (John).*

Finally, David mentioned his heritage as an influence in his life:

*“One reason why I chose Norway is because my Mom’s side of the family has Norwegian heritage. My grandmother is full Norwegian and so this heritage was always talked about when I was growing up” (David).*

Based on the definition of the concept and the comments given by the study participants, heritage seeking fits well into the family and personal history aspect of the mobility capital concept and proves to be an important motivation to go abroad.

### ***Previous Experience of Mobility Including Language Competence***

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) defines a previous experience of mobility as “any contact or stay abroad in a country other than the student’s country and language of origin, implying national border crossing. Internal mobility is therefore normally excluded from this category” (p. 60). The participants mostly followed the same pattern in regards to mobility. In fact, all of the participants except one grew up in relative isolation in a small town. Marie grew up in small town Texas, Lindsay in small town Alabama, and John in small town Minnesota. The one exception is Mark who grew up just outside of Washington, DC. John sums up the experiences of all participants when he states:

*“Our entire family grew up in small town Minnesota so we aren’t internationally oriented. We traveled within the US a lot when I grew up but no international travel at all” (John).*

Regarding language competence all students followed the same pattern. Each expressed a basic knowledge of one or two languages that were learned in middle school or high school

however they are rarely used now. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) declares that “language competence is obviously a significant part of the experience of mobility. Indeed, one of the main motivations for institutionally or privately organized student travel is language learning” (p.61). Only one of the participants in this study, however, stated they decided to study abroad to improve their language skills: James. He explains:

*“I came to UiO to study Norwegian and practice my speaking”* (James).

The trend seen amongst the students regarding language might be explained by the relative isolation of the United States coupled with the dominance of English language media throughout the country which were discussed earlier in chapter 2. The common level of language competence of the majority of the participants is summed up well by Julie:

*“When I graduated high school I spoke Spanish although it has dwindled. I tried to learn German in college and am trying to pick it up again”* (Julie).

One exception to this trend is Marie who states the following of her competence:

*“I grew up speaking Spanish and I also minored in it in college. My first exposure to Spanish was when I was a little kid. During elementary school we started learning Spanish and I was surrounded by immigrants who spoke Spanish”* (Marie).

Based on the data acquired from the interviews I can conclude that this element of mobility capital is hardly present amongst the group.

### ***The First Experience of Adaptation Which Serves as an Initiation***

Regarding the first experience of adaptation, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) states that “these situations have in common the fact that the individuals concerned are confronted with an unknown world whose social rules they do not master and which confers on them the status of temporary stranger” (*Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*, p. 64). These experiences can be classified as “internal, within national territory; or external, outside it” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p.64). While none of the participants had any external mobility experiences, many of them experienced internal mobility. John had some experience beyond his life growing up in small town Minnesota. He explains:



*“I went away to a boarding school in high school so I am used to being away from home” (John).*

Two other students expressed that their experiences did prepare them to go abroad for study. David states:

*“I moved away from home at the end of high school to attend college in San Francisco. Also, both of my parents are from Minnesota and my dad wanted to get away from his family and ended up moving to Alaska. Therefore most of my family lives in Minnesota so I am always away from them. I think it made it easier for me to adjust going abroad because I have already experienced being away from family.” (David).*

Marie described a similar experience:

*“I moved out of my parents’ house when I was 18 so I was used to change and ready to go abroad to Norway” (Marie).*

Although the levels of language competence were not high among the participants, many of them experienced internal mobility which served as an initiation for them.

### ***The Personality Features of the Potential Wanderer***

Regarding personality, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) concludes that “those who acquire the travel bug have a different personality from their brothers and sisters, and consequently make different choices” (*Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*, p. 67). All of the participants tended to express similar ideas. They all considered themselves open to trying new things and outgoing which helped them make the move to go abroad for study. An interesting angle I pursued in my interviews involved asking the participants to determine if their personalities differed from their peers back home which made them able to go abroad. David provided an insightful response:

*“I am very curious and interested in seeing what’s out there. Growing up in Alaska I did a lot of backpacking and exploring so I am a very adventurous person. I think these traits and my ability to go abroad differentiates me from my peers, especially in Alaska. Most*

*people I know there have never left Alaska and don't have that curiosity or adventurous drive to go out. I think those traits make it very easy to go abroad"* (David).

Mark also added some interesting input into the topic:

*"I'm a very sociable person as well and am more adventurous. I feel that many of my friends thought what I was doing was interesting but that they would never be able to make it happen for themselves. I have a few friends who are going abroad which made it easier to discuss different expectations and compare destination countries. I definitely feel that I am different though than most of my friends as I am able to follow through with the study abroad as opposed to just talk about it being an interesting thing to do"* (Mark).

Next, Julie mentioned the relationship between her personality and background that may have contributed to her decision to go abroad:

*"I've always seen myself as a rolling stone type so I am comfortable with moving, even though my family did not move around much when I was young. I've always had this ingrained drive to change my surroundings so this program was a seductive choice"* (Julie).

Lindsay also provided an intriguing response:

*"I think I have always been a very adventurous and outgoing person, in that even as a child I would jump on every opportunity to explore new places and see new things that came my way. The older I got, the more pronounced this character trait became until... well, I'm living in Norway now, aren't I? I also think I'm very adaptable to new surroundings, so that it doesn't take me long to get settled and comfortable in new environments"* (Lindsay).

The opinions regarding personality expressed by the participants are in line with Murphy-Lejeune (2002) who states that "most students list curiosity, attraction for novelty or difference, and finally sociability or a desire to communicate and seek social contacts as the three core elements of the travelling personality" (*Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*, p. 67). Therefore, it can be concluded that they possess a significant amount of mobility capital in this area.

## 5.2 Barriers

This section will be devoted to analyzing the barriers the participants faced during the decision-making process to study abroad. Remember that in chapter 2 I grouped them into *Financial, Knowledge and Institutional* categories.

### ***Financial Barriers***

All of the participants in the study were able to overcome the common barriers that prevent many students from going abroad, although not without some work involved. In fact, they all characterized their family as “middle class”, and were able to obtain the necessary funds to pay for tuition and the study abroad program one way or another. Mark describes his situation which is common amongst American students:

*“My family is very middle class as we live off of my mom’s teacher salary. I have financial aid at university but have a job to pay for my living expenses, and I work during all summers and holidays”* (Mark).

David’s situation also represents a large majority of American students:

*“My family is middle class and I had to get loans to pay for college, however my parents were able to help me study abroad”* (David).

Marie, on the other hand was a bit more fortunate than many:

*“My family is middle class and with the help of my grandmother they were able to pay for all of my college expenses”* (Marie).

Overall it was encouraging to find that all of the participants were able to overcome the most common barrier for students hoping to go abroad: Cost.

An interesting comparison can be made here between my study and the one described in chapter 3 conducted by Sánchez, Fornerino and Zhang (2006). They found that familial barriers (e.g. difficult to be away from family, miss family and friends, too many obligations

at home) were the most common. However, none of the participants in my study mentioned family as a barrier. In fact, the most important barrier they discussed was financial.

### ***Knowledge Barriers***

The findings obtained in the study show that none of the participants faced any knowledge barriers when attempting to study abroad. Their fear of the unknown was limited with the help of their personality traits outlined in the previous section, and their lack of foreign language knowledge was alleviated by them finding programs where English was the working language. The fact that none of the participants in this study faced any knowledge barriers when attempting to study abroad could be argued to reinforce Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) claim that students who go abroad hold higher levels of Mobility Capital than those who do not. The participants' family and personal histories, previous experiences of mobility, first experiences of adaptation, and personality features could very easily have provided them with more knowledge and abilities to overcome these barriers than others possess.

### ***Institutional Barriers***

Although I did not acquire much data related to the institutional barriers the participants faced, Mark did mention a relevant experience he had while researching:

*"I began to look at the programs offered at U Maryland and they had "transfer" programs where you exchange with 1 person within your country of destination. I wanted to do this as opposed to the other available option which was the group study program. I received an email from my university's study abroad office linking me to their website showing all of the study abroad options and I went into the office and spoke to advisers" (Mark).*

His experience shows he had no problems accessing information about available programs and was supported in his efforts by his university.

In general, all participants in the study were able to overcome the barriers described here. However, based on the current statistics on the number of Americans studying abroad, it can be assumed that not all are as fortunate.

## 5.3 Why Study Abroad?

I will now begin the analysis of the two main research questions highlighted in the introduction. As a refresher, these questions are:

*What are the motivations which lead American university students to study abroad?*

*What are the motivations which lead these students to choose Norway as their destination?*

Although these two questions are clearly related, I have chosen to analyze them separately, beginning with the first. During the interview process I was also careful to ensure that the questions involving the motivations and influences for studying abroad and choosing Norway were kept separate. This was intended to help make the following presentation and analysis of the data more clear and easy to understand.

### Motivations

Lindsay discussed a motivation related to her time growing up and her personality. She explains:

*“My home university is in my hometown so I never had the opportunity to be a new me, so coming here has been transformative for me. I can still be me but I am the new me which I like better. Also, meeting new people is an important factor”* (Lindsay).

Her hope to gain personal growth from the study abroad experience is an investment motive that is extrinsic in nature.

Both Marie and David highlight motivations related to an interest in learning and discovery. Marie declares:

*“I have always been interested in discovering other cultures. Americans all know where their families are from but they don’t generally get the chance to see these places and discover how the people live” (Marie).*

Whereas Marie had a motivation to discover a new culture, David eluded to a personal interest he had. He states:

*“I wanted to do a study abroad because I like languages. Also, my political views are quite liberal compared to other Americans so I wanted to get out and discover how western European systems work and how the people live” (David).*

These two motivations can be considered consumption because they are based on learning for the sheer pleasure of it. The motivations are therefore also intrinsic. However, David also cited another type of benefit a study abroad experience could bring:

*“I think having study abroad programs on my resume would be valuable for an employer and also for a university if I want to do a master’s program” (David).*

Because this motivation is lead by the idea of improving competitiveness in the search for a professional or academic position, it falls under the investment category and is extrinsic. The Human Capital theory is also quite relevant to mention here because its core principle is based on the idea that acquiring educational qualifications or training is an investment that can be traded later for monetary or non-monetary gain. Julie also recognized the value of study abroad, but showed it did not have much of a factor in her decision to do it. She states:

*“It [study abroad] is valuable for competitiveness in future work endeavors although I did not really think of it as a motivation for going abroad” (Julie).*

Although this motivation would fall under the investment motive and extrinsic motivation categories, Julie states that it was not much a factor in her decision to go abroad. John had a more definitive response regarding external motivations to go abroad which are similar to that of Julie:

*“There were no career motives behind going abroad as it is not so relevant to my field of computer science” (John).*

This highlights a trend present in the responses of the majority of the participants. Although they acknowledged the professional investment benefits doing a study abroad program, they were not much of a factor in their decision to do so. This finding is not in line with the study by Sánchez, Fornerino and Zhang (2006) who found that professional motivations (e.g. benefit future career, be richer, make a professional work connection) were the second most common motivation for their American participants. James was one exception however that did speak of a possible end goal he hoped to achieve by studying in Norway:

*“I came to UiO to study Norwegian and practice my speaking and to hopefully become an expatriate” (James).*

The fact that the Sánchez, Fornerino and Zhang study focused on business students might show why professional gain was high on the list of motivations, especially when compared to my study which included a majority of participants in social science and humanities programs. This comparison of the motivations expressed by students in different disciplines would make for an interesting future study.

As it turns out, the most common idea of the reasons for and benefits of studying abroad expressed by the participants was that it would broaden the cultural understanding of Americans. David provided some valuable insight on this topic:

*“I think studying abroad is very valuable, especially for Americans. The US is so isolated and has such a dominant culture that it is difficult to be exposed to foreign cultures and languages. Coming here to Norway you realize that there is more out there than just what we get in the U.S. Many Americans have predisposed views of the world without any experience with it and going abroad would really help them learn about other cultures and their own. I think the experience is very rewarding.” (David).*

Marie also held similar views:

*“I definitely think study abroad is valuable, especially for Americans. We are so focused on our country and culture that we are very unaware of other cultures. It helps you learn to tolerate others and to adapt to different types of people with different viewpoints” (Marie).*

Julie takes this idea a bit further:

*“I absolutely feel that studying abroad is valuable to be able to be exposed to other systems and gain a deeper understanding of how they work. Also to engender a more flexible and dynamic personality which will help them in anything they do. It will help them to adapt to any future changes and experiences” (Julie).*

Julie’s motivation of personal growth can be considered a non-monetary investment that is extrinsically motivated. This is also an illustration of the Human Capital theory at work. This is in line with Sánchez, Fornerino and Zhang (2006) who found that motivations regarding the search for a new experience (e.g. experience another culture, travel, international experience) were the most important factor for their participants. In addition, this relates well to the discussion held in chapter 2 regarding the disposition of the United States and the American people.

## **Influences**

As discussed in chapter 3, influences are also important factors in the decision-making process. The most common influences discussed by the participants were related to family and school ties. John states the following about his particular influences:

*“My dad lived in France for a year so he always spoke French when I was growing up and it was expected that I would eventually study abroad somewhere as well. I also met international students in college and thought going abroad would be a fun thing to do. I’ve been told that everyone needs to study abroad once their lives and I got a recommendation from a teacher at my university to do it.” (John).*

While John cited his father and fellow students as his main influences, David said:

*“I have a cousin who grew up speaking German as her mom is German and she lived in the Netherlands for three years along with studying abroad in Poland during her master’s*



*degree. She lives near San Francisco so she always encouraged me to go abroad and told me stories about her experiences in Europe. She was a big motivation for me to go abroad as well” (David).*

Mark listed a foreign-born parent as his influence:

*“I knew in high school that I wanted to go abroad as many students in my school were often going. My mom is from Australia so I have traveled there with family and knew I wanted to go off on my own and experience other cultures for myself. I want to experience other cultures and knew I could study abroad to be able to do this while continuing to study.” (Mark).*

James and Lindsay were the only two participants who mentioned friends as important influences. Lindsay highlighted a specific interest she shares with both her friends and family:

*“All of my friends really enjoy traveling and we encourage each other to go different places. My friends and family were excited for me to go abroad as doing so is very important to us” (Lindsay).*

James also cited friends and school ties as influences. He states:

*“One friend went to Greece and another to France. I also had friends in my Norwegian courses that went to Norway before me. My teacher and academic adviser was also an influence for me to go abroad as she told me to go abroad” (James).*

These statements help illustrate the importance of family ties, school connections, and friends in influencing whether a student chooses to go abroad for study.

## **5.4 Why Choose Norway?**

Let us now move on to the motivations for choosing Norway as the destination country. Based on the data collected in the interviews, I have chosen to divide these

motivations into three categories: *Country-specific, program-specific and circumstantial*. The main reason for choosing these categories, apart from them being the most representative of the types of responses provided in the interviews, was because I hoped to determine which motivations were specific to Norway as a country and which were not. Let's begin with the *country-specific* motivations.

### ***Country-Specific***

Country-specific motivations involve everything that is specific to Norway the country. Throughout the interviews there were common themes discussed. These themes were related to discovering aspects of the social and political system, the culture and climate, the English-language offerings, and the academic quality. Tuition was also an important theme so we will begin our analysis there. All but one of the participants declared that the absence of tuition fees was a huge motivating factor in their decision to come to Norway. According to Julie:

*“The lack of tuition fees was absolutely a factor in my decision to come to Norway. It’s an unbelievable opportunity. I would recommend Norway as a study destination for others because of the ability to get a degree for free.”* (Julie).

This declaration by Julie sheds light on a common barrier placed upon American students who wish to go abroad. Because tuition fees are so high at home it is often difficult or impossible to afford a study abroad program in addition. Therefore, a country like Norway is particularly attractive to American students since this problem is simply absent. Mark adds to the ideas expressed by Julie:

*“The lack of tuition at UiO was a definite benefit in my coming here as I can use the money to travel around Europe”* (Mark).

James is the one exception to the common response regarding tuition fees in Norway. He states:

*“Tuition was not a factor as it was worked out through my home university”* (James).

He therefore was able to pay his home university's standard tuition fee for his study abroad program. This method has become increasingly common in U.S. universities as the commitment to sending students abroad has strengthened.

The fact that tuition is free to study in Norway was listed as a main motivation for the participants' to study there is not in line with SIU's study described in chapter 3 which found that this factor was not among the most significant. This difference could be because of the high tuition rates American students must pay compared to those common in many European systems. As SIU's study analyzed the motivations of international students from many countries (including many from Europe), this finding is not surprising.

Next, we can look at the motivations related to the Norwegian social and political system. A large majority of the students mentioned some relevant aspects of Norway as motivations for studying there. Statements from Julie, David and Mark are all worth highlighting here. Julie explains:

*"Another more important factor would be for Americans to be able to experience a more socialist system and how it works. My experience since coming has been eye opening and I am not sure if I will be able to move back to the US"* (Julie).

During my interview with Julie she frequently mentioned that she had always considered herself to have more left views than her peers. Her reflections are in line with this view. David discussed a similar view:

*"I was very interested in the social system and wanted to experience it for myself and test my theories about it. Especially being American there is a fear of socialism and I wanted to learn about it"* (David).

Mark shed some light on another aspect about the Norwegian system that motivated him:

*"I am an environmental science major so I wanted to go somewhere where I felt had implemented sustainable living ideas and was living that lifestyle"* (Mark).

Each of these students expressed how social and political aspects of Norway influenced their decision to choose it as their destination country for study abroad. This finding is not in line with SIU's study who found that only the Norwegian nature was an important factor

mentioned by their participants. In addition, the Norwegian welfare state was mentioned as a less important factor.

Next, we can look at the motivations related to the Norwegian culture and climate. In general the participants all expressed stereotypes about Norway that interested them. Mark explains:

*“The culture and weather in Norway were very interesting to me before coming here because I wanted a snowy winter where I could ski as it is different from where I come from. A friend of mine from England lived in Oslo for a while and was able to tell me some things about the culture, the city, brown cheese, and the fact that everyone cross-country skis. This sounded really cool to me as it is a completely different lifestyle from my own. “I also thought that Norway is a very safe country which factored into my decision to come here” (Mark).*

David expressed a similar outlook:

*“I had good expectations about Norway and thought there would be a lot of blondes on skis. I thought the country would be quite liberal and have similar weather to Alaska. Also, the climate is very similar to Alaska along with the topography.” (David).*

Julie also shared some good ideas about Norway but was a bit negative as well:

*“I didn’t know too much about Norway before leaving so I did try to collect a cultural understanding. I thought Norway would be cold and dark all the time and I was expecting to see a lot of exciting Scandinavian Design as many students during my undergraduate institution would mention that fact. I also thought Norway would be efficient” (Julie).*

Finally, Marie focused on a more historical interest in the culture:

*“My personal interest in Nordic Viking culture was my main motivation” (Marie).*

An important note to add here is the mentioning of negative stereotypes by the participants that are impossible for Norway to change (e.g. climate and light).

Now, we can look at the prevalence of English amongst Norwegian society and its universities as a factor. Mark sums this up well:

*“I knew I wanted to be able to take courses in English and get along in society with English as I do not speak any other languages well. Many people speak English in Norway and that was a huge factor in my decision to come here. (Mark).*

The availability of English-language programs and courses was one of the more common motivations mentioned by the participants in my study. This is in line with SIU’s study which found that this was the most important factor for its participants.

Finally, we can look at the perception of the academic quality of Norwegian universities as a factor. The overall consensus amongst the participants was that this was not much of a factor at all in their decision to study in Norway. Julie’s thoughts can be used as a good summary of the overall consensus provided:

*“I only recently checked how UiO is ranked internationally but it wasn’t much of a factor in my decision to go to Norway” (Julie).*

The fact that Julie didn’t bother to look up the ranking of the university helps to show the lack of importance it had on her decision to study there. John expressed a similar idea:

*“I thought of UiO as a decent university but the quality was not a factor in my decision to study in Norway” (John).*

Lindsay did, however, express some motivation based on the perception of quality of the Norwegian universities. She explains:

*“I was impressed with the nobel laureates listed in the UiO faculty so I was anticipating some very high quality courses at UiO” (Lindsay).*

This finding is not in line with SIU’s study which found that the quality of education and reputation of studies and research were two of the most important motivations mentioned by its participants.

One interesting additional motivation that was unique to the group was described by Marie:

*“I will remain in Norway as I have recently gotten married to a Norwegian man. We met while I was in Norway the first time for the International Summer School, so he was definitely a motivation for me to apply to the master’s program and return to Norway (Marie).*

It is difficult to place love into any of the categories I have mentioned but it is certainly an important personal motivation. I would, however, certainly argue that it is definitely an investment! SIU’s study concluded that although love is one of the most important reasons why foreign scholars and researchers go to Norway, this is not the case with students. The results of my study are in line with this conclusion as only one participant mentioned love as an important motivation.

As you can see there were many motivations specifically related to Norway as a country that influenced the participants to choose to study there. Let us now focus on any program-specific motivations that were present in the findings.

### ***Program-Specific***

Program-specific motivations involve anything related to the courses or degrees offered by the University of Oslo. Many of the students expressed interest in specific degrees or courses at UiO. James, who just finished a Bachelor’s degree in the Norwegian language at his home university in North Dakota, listed the following motivation for choosing UiO:

*“I came to UiO to study Norwegian and practice my speaking and to hopefully become an expatriate” (James).*

Lindsay, a bachelor’s student in history at her home university in Alabama, expressed an interest in a specific course at UiO:

*“I am in the Public History program at my home university and there is a conservation course at UiO and I wanted to take that” (Lindsay).*

As you can see there were a few key program-specific motivations highlighted by the participants. Now that we have looked at both country and program-specific motivations to come to Norway, we can now discuss those students who had motivations unrelated to specifics about Norway or the University of Oslo. These I have categorized as circumstantial.

### ***Circumstantial***

Two students, Mark and Julie, mentioned some relevant motivations. Mark explains:

*“I looked at the available programs and found one in Sweden and one in Norway, and I decided that Scandinavia would be a great place to go. I settled on going to Oslo, but mostly because my first choice of Sweden was full”* (Mark).

Julie stated another circumstantial motivation:

*“The program was an influence in my decision although I did not know too much about it before coming. Really Norway just fell into place for me as I knew I wanted to do the Fulbright program and I had a connection with Norway due to the professor”* (Julie).

An interesting trend to note is that it was quite common for students to list seemingly conflicting motivations for choosing Norway. For example, Julie, who mentioned her department at UiO as having a well-known reputation, also stated that she wanted to do a Fulbright and just happened to have a connection to a professor with ties to the department. Therefore, even though her initial motivation may have been circumstantial, she then developed another layer of motivation related to the department, which is program-specific. Next, we will move on to the influences present in the participants' lives which contributed to their decision to study in Norway.

### ***Influences to Choose Norway***

In order to determine the influences involved in helping the participants choose Norway as their destination, I had to ask some specific questions. I needed to find out about the reactions they received from those around them when Norway was mentioned as the potential country. Even though all of the participants' friends and family were supportive of them doing a study abroad program, it was commonly expressed that once Norway was mentioned as the destination, both confusion and apprehension was expressed. Mark had this to say regarding the reactions he received:

*“It seemed really random at first knowing I was going to Norway of all places. Many of my friends didn’t even know where Oslo was, let alone that it was the capital of Norway”*  
(Mark).

Julie received a similar reaction:

*“In terms of friends and family mostly the reaction I got when I said I wanted to do this program was ‘Norway? Where is that? Why?’”(Julie).*

These two reactions show that a lack of knowledge about Norway may have contributed to the confusion expressed by those around them when hearing about their thoughts to study there, which are related to the discussion in chapter 2 regarding the disposition of the United States and Americans. It can also be considered a knowledge barrier which was also discussed in chapter 2.

John highlighted another aspect when he stated:

*“People were wondering why I chose Norway as it is not a common place to study and also it is not thought of as a huge cultural difference from the US”* (John).

Another rather negative reaction to Norway by outside influences was expressed by James who states:

*“My family knew I had intended to go to Norway as I had expressed an interest in going, but they wondered why I would choose such a cold climate”* (James).

Each of these statements help to show that outside influences were not much of a factor in helping the participants decide to choose Norway for their study abroad program. In addition, the views expressed by the influences involved in the participants’ lives are prime examples of the knowledge barriers discussed earlier in chapter 2. The lack of knowledge leading to the apprehension and confusion about going to a country can prevent many potential students from going abroad.



## 5.5 Hypotheses

Now that I have presented the data obtained in the interviews related to the motivations to choose Norway, I would like to analyze the initial hypotheses first introduced in chapter 2.

*Hypothesis 1: Students study in Norway based on circumstances.*

This thesis was not well supported by the findings as many motivations specific to Norway were mentioned as important in the decision-making process. These will be covered below in the remaining hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 2: Family Lineage*

Based on the data, I found that many of the participants cited a Norwegian family member as a significant motivation to choose to study in Norway. Choosing to study in Norway based on a family linkage can be placed under the category of a personal motivation because it is done solely with intention of fulfilling a personal satisfaction. The Heritage-Seeking theory represents this as well. This idea is also a consumption motive that is intrinsically motivated.

*Hypothesis 3: Interest in Norwegian culture/language/politics.*

Besides family lineage, the participants cited an interest in discovering one or many aspects of the Norwegian culture as a top motivation, which is in line with my initial hypothesis. This can be considered a consumption motive that is intrinsically motivated like the first hypothesis just mentioned.

*Hypothesis 4: Availability of English-language programs and courses.*

The findings help illustrate that the availability of English programs along with the prevalence of English spoken amongst Norwegians were both huge motivations for students

to choose to study there. As described in chapter 2, many Americans suffer the knowledge barrier of a lack in adequate foreign language proficiency to enter a study abroad program of their choice. Therefore, the availability of English programs and courses at the University of Oslo allowed the participants to overcome this.

*Hypothesis 5: Absence of tuition fees.*

An absence of tuition fees was also an important factor in the participants' decisions to study in Norway. This is related to Human Capital theory because they consider this aspect a positive investment. It is positive because they are able to earn informational capital which, as discussed earlier in chapter 3, can be converted into economic or cultural capital later on. In other words, students do not need to make any financial investments in the form of tuition fees in order to receive the anticipated monetary or non-monetary returns. As this is an investment, it is also considered an extrinsic motivation.

## 6 Reflections

Although the research study presented in this paper aimed to discover the motivations that lead American university students to study abroad and choose Norway as their destination there was also a hope of bringing to light the importance of cross-cultural understanding and awareness in today's world, particularly for Americans. Therefore it was also interesting for me to learn more about the current state of study abroad in the U.S. and Norway, and about their efforts to foster exchange between them.

Having presented and analyzed the findings obtained from interviewing seven students at the University of Oslo, I conclude that the decision to go abroad and to choose a destination country is a complex process that involves many motivations and influences and can be affected by many barriers. Students begin by acquiring varying levels of mobility capital throughout their lives which involve their family and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaptation which serves as an initiation, and finally the personality features of the potential wanderer. The motives can be personal or professional, be related to consumption or investment, and be intrinsic or extrinsic.

With this in mind there were some specific elements that were more prevalent than others in the case of my specific study participants. The most important motivations for going abroad present in all of the participants' responses are personal rather than professional. The desire to experience another culture was by far the most common motivation given by the participants and was mentioned as an essential experience for any American to have. This motivation falls under the consumption category and is intrinsic in nature. Another common motivation mentioned was the hope of obtaining personal growth during their stay abroad. This motivation falls under the investment category and is extrinsic in nature.

While all of the students mentioned some types of professional investment motivations (e.g. increased competitiveness in the labor market), they were mostly insignificant for them during the decision process. In fact, when probed about such motivations most agreed that while they could imagine the professional benefits a study abroad experience could give them (e.g. higher income, better job prospects), they were not important factors. This was a

surprising find for me considering the fact that the competitiveness of the job market continues to increase every year. Therefore, people will need to find ways to distinguish themselves. Moreover, globalization has increased the importance of and demand for an internationally-oriented labor force. Thus, the international experience earned from a study abroad program is one way of doing this. Based on these findings, the investment in education for economic gain described in the Human Capital and Signaling theories was not relevant in relation to the seven participants involved in this study. However, the non-monetary component of Human Capital is relevant as the participants invested time and money for personal growth obtained through the experience abroad.

Regarding the motivations for choosing Norway as their destination country, the most important aspects mentioned by all are related to family heritage, discovering aspects of the Norwegian culture such as the Norwegian language and Viking history, and its political and social viewpoints (e.g. desire to experience more “progressive” views than they are accustomed to in the U.S.). These can be described as country-specific motivations because they all relate to certain aspects of Norway as a country, as opposed to program-specific or circumstantial which were less important. These findings are in line with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> hypotheses I discussed earlier in chapter 2 which suggested students going to Norway for study would have family linkages there and an interest in the Norwegian culture, language and/or politics. Hypotheses 4 and 5 were also well supported by the findings. All of the students listed the availability of English-language programs and the absence of tuition fees as key motivations for choosing to study in Norway. The remaining hypothesis suggesting circumstantial factors as the main motivation for choosing Norway was not well supported by the findings because only a small number of the participants listed them.

An interesting find was the lack of motivation that stemmed from the perception of academic quality of Norwegian universities or the University of Oslo specifically. Only one participant mentioned Nobel Laureates while the rest admitted they hardly even considered academic quality before going. Although many came to Norway to study a certain subject, questions about quality were not considered.

Regarding Mobility Capital it is difficult to conclude whether or not the participants held conclusively high or low levels. This is due to the fact that a majority of them held high levels in some areas but very low levels in others, leading to too much variance. For example, they all described their personalities as outgoing and adventurous yet the majority of them

grew up in a small, isolated town lacking in international exposure. However, if Murphy-Lejeune's definition holds true, their levels of Mobility Capital were high enough to send them abroad over their peers.

Also, the participants did not hold a conclusive level of Cultural Capital overall that contributed to their decision to go abroad, although a few were exposed to foreign-born family members.

As I mentioned back in chapter 4, a key limitation to my study is that there were only seven participants selected. Therefore, it must be noted that it is impossible to speak generally about all students in Norway or draw definitive conclusions about the hypotheses presented throughout this paper. However, gaining a deeper understanding about these seven students can still be a beneficial addition to the present and future body of knowledge in the field.

I would also like to reflect on some additional findings I obtained during the interviews which led me to some ideas for future research. The first involves the study participants' ideas of the academic quality of the University of Oslo after they had been studying there for a few months. Although this was not included as a specific question in my interview, each participant voluntarily described to me their experiences in this area. The overall feelings toward the quality of their academics at the university as compared to their experiences in the U.S. system were similar amongst all participants. Therefore, I feel it would be quite an interesting topic to explore further in a future research study. All of the students were surprised by the differences between taking courses in the U.S. and Norway, mostly related to course structure and style of teaching. These comments shed some interesting light on the experiences of the participants studying at the University of Oslo.

Although I chose not to differentiate between the different types and durations of the study abroad programs the participants were doing, it would also make for an interesting further study. Do the motivations change depending on the type of study program the student will do? Questions of this nature would be rewarding to pose and research.

## 6.1 Implications

Why is a study such as the one presented in this paper important? As globalization continues to push the world closer together it is imperative that higher education systems around the world work to establish new links and strengthen existing ones. Therefore, this study which discusses a connection between The United States and Norway in relation to study abroad is relevant in today's global climate.

First let's discuss the implications of this study and its findings for Norway. Determining the main motivations for a student to choose Norway as their study abroad destination will help the country to find ways to attract more foreign students (not just Americans) to its universities. This falls in line with the North America Strategy for Higher Education introduced by the Norwegian Ministry of Education in 2008. Having the knowledge of the key aspects that attract international students can help Norway and its policy-makers to better market itself globally to remain competitive in the higher education market. With countries like Australia making great strides in attracting international students from around the world, Norway must find ways to do the same. As more and more higher education systems around the developing world begin to massify, I predict a huge influx of students wishing to go abroad for their education will result. Therefore, new diverse talent will be emerging that countries like Norway could benefit from, particularly with the emerging focus on "mode 2" knowledge.

Based on the findings obtained in this study I can conclude that there are at least two areas of the Norwegian higher education system that will continue to remain important for international students looking to study abroad: The availability of English-language programs and the absence of tuition fees. As English has become so dominant globally it is extremely important for a country like Norway, with a language unknown to most, to offer more programs and courses in English. The absence of tuition fees is particularly attractive to Americans based on the high tuition costs in the United States. Although Norway does not profit from tuition fees, it is still important to attract new international talent to the country. This talent can help foster international dialogue, contribute new ideas to research and the labor market, and strengthen ties between their home countries and Norway.

Although the more negative perceptions and opinions about Norway expressed by participants and their influences are related to aspects impossible to change (e.g. climate, “obscure” compared to other well-known European countries, dark), it can still help the country to know about them. One way Norway can promote itself is to focus on some elements mentioned by the participants such as the society’s openness and progressive outlook.

Now let’s move on to the relevance and implications for the U.S. This study helps bring to light the fact that although the total number of Americans studying abroad has dramatically increased in recent years, it is still quite low compared to the overall number of students enrolled in higher education. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the financial, knowledge and institutional barriers American students face while attempting to study abroad and actively and aggressively strive to eliminate them, as not all students are as fortunate as those in this study turned out to be.

Plans like The Norway America Strategy and organizations like NORAM and the U.S.-Norway Fulbright Foundation for Educational Exchange should be embraced and maintained by the U.S. in order to foster growth, collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, and to allow more students to go abroad to countries of their choice. Both universities and secondary schools in the U.S. should promote education abroad as exciting, enriching and rewarding both personally and professionally in order to motivate more students to embark on this rewarding experience, particularly as the need for an internationally-oriented citizenry is ever-increasing. Steps should also be taken to ensure institutional commitment to internationalization, particularly study abroad, is in line with the national goals like those expressed in the Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act presented by congress in 2007. An increased focus on graduate-level study abroad should also be a priority to help foster collaboration in research.

Intercultural understanding and cooperation are important elements that help lead us to a more peaceful world, and study abroad is one way to promote them. Therefore, I can only hope the world recognizes this and continues to nurture existing programs and works to create new ones. It can only make us stronger.

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# Appendix A

## Thesis Presentation for Interviewees

Hello!

My name is Brant Monaghan and I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. This letter serves as a brief introduction to the study and will outline what your role will be in my research.

First I would like to tell you a little bit about myself. I am 27 years old and was born and raised in Seattle. I am in my final semester of my Master of Philosophy degree in Higher Education, which is the study of the university as an institution, its inner workings, and its relationship to society. The program is Erasmus Mundus which means it is a joint degree from 3 universities in Europe. I've spent time here in Oslo, in Finland (Tampere), and in Portugal (Aveiro). It has been a great experience. I look forward to learning more about you and your experiences.

The current working title of the thesis is:

An American in Oslo: The Motivations of American University Students to Study Abroad in Norway.

I am interested in learning about the motivations of American students to study abroad in general and their motivations for choosing Norway as their destination. My focus group is American students at the University of Oslo and I intend to interview 10 students. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

As of now I expect to be ready to begin the interviews by the second week of March. However, I will keep you updated and we can arrange a time to meet.

I would appreciate it if you would please email your responses to the included questionnaire to the following address: [monaghanb@gmail.com](mailto:monaghanb@gmail.com)

I hope all is going well for you here in Oslo!

Brant

## **Preliminary Questionnaire**

Name:

Age:

Degree Level (Bachelor/Master):

Home University (If applicable):

Program of Study/Major:

Length of study abroad program:

# Appendix B

## Interview Guide

When did you first consider going abroad?

Why did you decide to go abroad?

*Probe: Did you seek personal, professional or academic enrichment?*

*Probe: Did you want to experience another language and culture?*

*Probe: Did you want to experience life on your own away from family and friends?*

*Probe: Did you want to go on an adventure?*

*Probe: Is it a requirement for your degree at your home university?*

Had you been abroad before this program? Elaborate.

Did anyone influence your decision to go abroad?

How did your friends and family feel about your decision?

Did any siblings or friends go abroad before you or at the same time?

What about your personality do you think made you interested in studying abroad?

*Probe: Do you feel you differ from your peers back home in any way in regards to your personality or decision to go abroad?*

Can you describe your family's background?

Did your family ever move to new places? Travel?

Do you have family members who currently reside outside of the US?

Is anyone in your family bilingual?

Do you speak any other languages? *Proficiency?*

*Probe: When were you first exposed to foreign languages?*

Why did you choose Norway?

*Probe: Did you consider the academic quality of UiO when making your decision?*

*Probe: Do you have family in Norway? Did this influence your decision?*

*Probe: Were you interested in discovering the Norwegian culture and language?*

*Probe (if applicable): How did the absence of tuition fees factor into your decision?*

What images did you have of Norway before leaving?

How did you hear about the opportunity to study in Norway?

Would you study abroad in Norway again if given the chance? *Why or why not?*

Would you recommend Norway as a destination for study abroad? *Why or why not?*

Do you feel that studying abroad is valuable? *Why? Did you consider these before going abroad?*

*Probe: For personal enrichment?*

*Probe: For future academic advancement?*

*Probe: For future career?*

*Probe: For future income?*





